



But What If...?

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Over the past few weeks, the world has been experiencing a pandemic which has stolen almost everything that we previously called “Normal”. No one seems to understand the virus and we are certainly getting very mixed messages from sources that previously we would trust and respect without question.

Articles that I wrote in the past addressed depression and anxiety. You see, there has likely been degrees of depression and anxiety throughout recorded history – and perhaps even before that.

Those who experience depression are often “stuck” in the past. They focus on the things that happened which are over with and cannot be altered. They are gone!

Anxiety, on the other hand, is usually about the future and can be quickly spotted when a person starts a sentence with the words “But what if...”.

Unfortunately, anxiety and depression can be distractors - like static on a radio station. They draw attention from the present, replace it with agitation. This interferes with our ability to feel calm and function well.

Do you remember the children’s story about Chicken Little who had an acorn fall on his head? He incorrectly assumed the worst and decided to ignore everything the day held in order to go to tell the king that the sky was falling. His anxiety not only ruined his day but also the individuals who he met along the way. Goosy Loosie, Ducky Lucky and Turkey Lurky bought into his irrational fear and neglected their own priorities in order to accompany Chicken Little.

Uncertainty and false assumptions can also ruin your day if you let them. As soon as you find yourself saying “But what if...” consider the following:

1. On a piece of paper write down the absolute worse thing that could happen.
2. Determine whether this is a guarantee or just an unrealistic thought.
3. Adopt the attitude portrayed in the old adage “Hope for the best but prepare for the worst”.
4. Consider the obstacles that you and your family have overcome in the past which have built strength in your life.
5. Consult with individuals who can help you learn healthy strategies.
6. Take inventory and give thanks for the things that you have right now.
7. Feed your mind, your soul and your time with peaceful friends and surroundings.
8. Focus on and enjoy today (tomorrow is over and tomorrow hasn’t arrived yet).
9. Control the things that you can control – like getting enough rest, eating regularly, reaching out to others

10. Now turn the paper over and write down the absolute best things that could happen.

What if you found a new job that you like better than what you have been doing? What if you use your time alone to revive a hobby from long ago? What if you improve your physical and mental health by making better choices?

Chicken Little made an assumption and panicked irrationally. But his cohorts were also in trouble because they believed Chicken Little and latched onto his fear and impulsivity without any empirically based evidence. All of them lost out on the beauty of the day. You don't have to be like them.

Relax! Live one day at a time!